

VZCZCXRO7326  
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV  
DE RUEHKB #0995/01 2901545  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 161545Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0206  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3092  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1155

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000995

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC AND DRL FOR WENDY SILVERMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: "OPPOSITION COOPERATION CENTER" RELEASES ELECTION  
ASSESSMENT AND FUTURE PLANS

Classified By: Political and Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On October 16 the five opposition parties that boycotted the presidential election held a joint press conference and released a written statement on the conduct of the October 15 presidential election. The heads of the parties all stated that they considered the election not to have been free and fair, nor democratic and transparent, due to the numerous problems in the pre-election environment and problems witnessed on Election Day. The parties also agreed to continue to cooperate, and to create a unified platform for the 2009 municipal and 2010 parliamentary elections. If these parties can continue to cooperate and create a forward-looking, comprehensive platform, it would be a large, positive step forward in the development of political discourse in Azerbaijan. END SUMMARY

JOINT OPPOSITION STATEMENT ON ELECTION PROCESS  
-----

¶2. (SBU) On October 16 at noon the five traditional opposition parties which boycotted the election held a press conference. These parties, including the Popular Front Party, the Musavat Party, the Liberal Party, the For the Sake of Azerbaijan Forum, and the Citizen and Development Party, united during the pre-election period under the name "Opposition Cooperation Center." The heads of the five parties appeared together at the press conference, each giving a similar statement and answering questions from the press as a unit. They also released a written statement and a list of violations witnessed by their election observers. The conference was well attended by representatives of local and international press. (Note: on the same day, OSCE/ODIHR, the CIS and individuals representing the de-registered Election Monitoring Center also presented opinions on Azerbaijan's presidential election. These are reported septel. End Note)

¶3. (SBU) The opening speech of the press conference was given by Ali Karimli, head of the Popular Front Party. His headline was that the election could not be considered free and fair due to the problems with the political environment. In addition, Karimli highlighted the fact that many citizens were forced by employers to vote, and therefore the voter turnout figures should be viewed with skepticism. Karimli stated that the parties would continue to cooperate as they prepare for the 2009 municipal and 2010 parliamentary elections.

¶4. (SBU) After Karimli's opening statement, each party head

made his own statement. Both Isa Gambar (Musavat Party) and Eldar Namazov's (For the sake of Azerbaijan Forum) statements reflected the same themes as Karimli highlighted. In addition, Namazov announced that the Baku municipal authorities had denied their petition to hold a rally on October 18 in central Baku, and the parties planned to take this case to court. Avaz Termikhan of the Liberal Party, however, chose to focus on his perception of lack of support from the international community for democracy in Azerbaijan.

His example was the early congratulations given by the Turkish government to President Ilham Aliyev on his election victory. Karimli, however, immediately jumped in and said that all international groups were not stating the election was free and fair. Ali Aliyev of the Citizen and Development Party focused his speech on the plans for the opposition parties to continue cooperation and create a unified platform for the upcoming elections.

15. (SBU) In questions after the prepared statements, the opposition leaders were asked whether they would stick to their original statement made in September that any government elected in this election would be considered illegitimate. In response, Gambar stated that "we live in illegitimate times," which was a clear refusal to state publicly that the Aliyev regime was illegitimate. Despite this, the written statement released by the five parties closes with a sentence that says exactly this.

COMMENT

-----

BAKU 00000995 002 OF 002

16. (C) The commitment by all five parties to create a unified platform for the upcoming municipal and parliamentary elections is a major step forward for parties that historically have had a difficult time working together. If they can manage to continue a high level of cooperation and put together a comprehensive, forward-looking platform for the next round of elections, political discourse in Azerbaijan would be advanced. However, cohesion within this group is hard to maintain and opposition party structures are weak. To regain the popular support that they have lost over the years, the opposition has much work ahead.

DERSE